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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [EPET](#) [ETRD](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: PUTIN VISITS TURKEY: RUSSIA BIDS TO TURN TURKEY
FROM WEST; TURKS KEEPING OPTIONS OPEN

(U) Classified by Ambassador Eric Edelman; reasons: E.O.
12958 1.4 (b,d).

1. (C) Summary: Putin's visit demonstrated both Russia's assessment that Turkey is in play and the Turks' habit for mixing wishful thinking, barbarian handling, and a desire for (lucrative) attention. As of now, the visit appears not to have been the total breakthrough the Russians and some Turks are projecting it as. End summary.

2. (C) Putin's Dec. 6-7 descent on Ankara was the first bilateral visit by a head of state from Moscow since figurehead Soviet president Podgorny's 1972 visit. Some of the more hyperbolic accounts, and even Russian polcounselor Kunakov in his readout to us, cast his presence as the first visit by a powerful Russian head of state in 500 plus years of "bilateral" relations.

3. (C) The visit, postponed from Sept. owing to the Beslan attack, took place in the context of sharply negative Turkish opinion regarding the U.S. Fallujah operation, GOT edginess over prospects for an acceptable EU decision for the start of accession negotiations, and some Turkish circles' attempt to pump up a "Eurasian" alternative for Turkey. The diplomatic correspondent for Islamist "Yeni Safak", which in general is supportive of ruling AKP, told us that, whereas the GOT preferred the visit in early 2005, the Russians had insisted on coming before the end of 2004, i.e., before the EU summit.

4. (C) Putin held lengthy one-on-ones with President Sezer (one hour, extended from 30 minutes), PM Erdogan (two-and-a-half hours, extended from one hour), and parliamentary Speaker Arinc; he also addressed the Turkish Union of Chambers (TOBB), the country's mainstream small- to medium-sized business forum. FonMin Lavrov; Energy and Industry Minister Khristenko; DefMin Ivanov, who stayed on an extra day to press for sale of Russia's "Erdogan" attack helo and for mil-industrial cooperation; and the presidents of Gazprom, Transneft, RAO, Strojprom, and others accompanied. The motorcade at its height had 150 cars.

5. (C) The press fawned in the run-up and the day following the visit, when reports focused on normally wooden president Sezer's ultra-warm reception of Putin, Russian talk of a \$20 billion commercial and investment package, Putin's supposed tact and consideration, the Russian ambassador's carefully-planted comment that the Russians had been met with much greater interest than expected, and proclamation of a "multi-dimensional partnership". The press, led by sycophantic "Hurriyet" Ankara bureau chief Sedat Ergin, even managed to cast the Dec. 6 massive three-hour gridlock at rush hour as a moment for Putin to show his reported tact by apologizing, although another news story of his apology noted its backhanded nature since he put the blame for the snafu on the Turkish authorities. Much commentary turned cold overnight when most of the press (except for "Yeni Safak", which continues to emphasize what it sees as the visit's strategic importance) decided Putin had given nothing on neuralgic issues like Cyprus and the PKK.

5. (S) The visit pivoted around Putin's meetings with Sezer and Erdogan. Turkish interpreter Habil Topaloglu told "Aksam"'s diplomatic correspondent, who asked her for an evaluation of the visit at our request, that in all her years' interpreting she had never seen such effusive expressions of friendship as offered by Sezer, expressions which went "way beyond the dictates of protocol." Topaloglu described Erdogan as warm toward Putin, but not to the degree displayed by Sezer. In a Dec. 10 conversation with us, Russian polcounselor Kunakov, whom Putin regularly uses as an interpreter and who interpreted the Erdogan one-on-one from the Russian side, described Erdogan's welcome as very warm.

6. (S) "Aksam" Ankara bureau chief Nuray Basaran, who has the deepest and most comprehensive set of contacts in the AKP cabinet of all the journalists we know, told us Dec. 8 and 9 that, based on her inside sources, Putin delivered the following messages to Sezer and Erdogan:

--EU: The Turks should forget their "EU fantasy"; if they join the EU and implement Schengen criteria, Russia will cut off trade and reduce the volume of visits (including tourism), so they shouldn't implement Schengen. Turkey is bending its neck to the EU. It doesn't need to. Putin

stands fully behind Turkey, so Turkey can stand up to the EU (note: Basaran said some of Erdogan's advisors pressed him to use Putin's words to defy the EU openly; Erdogan refused. End note).

--U.S.: Russia and Turkey are living through a period when the U.S. is assaulting the whole region just to control oil and energy flows.

--Ukraine: Putin claimed to be dispirited that, despite American commitments to respect Russia's backyard, the U.S. has interfered in Ukraine's affairs,

--Energy and trade: If Turkey joins the EU, Russia will no longer be able to supply natural gas so cheaply (sic). Oil supplies will run out in the not too distant future and natural gas will be the main energy source for the next 500 years. In this regard there are only two suppliers who matter, Russia and Iran. Russia looms right on your doorstep. Russia and Turkey have the opportunity for cooperation on many issues: Caucasus, trade, oil and energy.

--Activities of the Fethullah Gulen lodge (Turkey's most powerful Islamist grouping, feared by the core institutions of the Turkish State; the Gulen lodge controls major business, trade, and publishing activities, has deeply penetrated the political scene -- including AKP at high levels -- and the Turkish National Police; and has a world-wide network of schools, including a number in the U.S. and the Russian Federation, schools whose opening Putin earlier appeared to have facilitated): Russia is concerned by what it sees as the Gulenist lodge's insidious Islamist agenda (note: Russian polcounselor Kunakov dodged and weaved but acknowledged the subject had been broached, although he claimed it was the Russian FSB rep who did so in the inter-service meeting. Ekrem Dumanli, editor of the Gulenist "Zaman" daily, one of the most widely read Turkish newspapers, and "Zaman" Ankara correspondent Mustafa Unal separately -- but very grudgingly -- conceded Dec. 9 that Putin indeed raised concerns about the Gulenist activity in Russia. Gulenist "Writers and Journalists Foundation" director Erkam Aytav has reluctantly acknowledged to us three times in recent months that the schools face pressure from the Russian authorities and that the Gulen lodge is trying to reach an accommodation with the regime since the schools lie at the heart of the Gulenist "mission" to Russia, i.e., the step-by-step conversion of Russia to Gulen's brand of Islam. Aytav also acknowledged the possibility that Russia wants to use the threats to close the schools to leverage Gulenist lobbying power for Russian interests in Turkey. Aytav and Dumanli have admitted to us separately that "Zaman"'s coverage of Russia has been kept bland as a means to mollify the Putin regime. End note).

17. (C) Turkish MFA's Dec. 7 briefing for EU, U.S. and ANZAC diplomats revealed no more than that (1) the MFA was kept less than minimally in the loop by both the presidency and prime ministry (DirGen Akinci admitted repeatedly that the MFA had no information about Putin's lengthy one-on-ones with Sezer and PM Erdogan); (2) the session between full delegations covered bilateral and regional issues in a set-piece manner and emphasized energy and economic ties (septsels for trade/investment and energy discussions); (3) Akinci, considered a Russophile both within the MFA and elsewhere, incompetently handled the sharp complaints from the Polish charge and Lithuanian ambassador that they had been the only neighboring countries excluded from Sezer's Dec. 6 state dinner. Both the Pole and the Lithuanian asked whether they had been excluded at Turkish or Russian insistence, and whether so owing to Kwasniewski and Adamkus' efforts to mediate the Ukraine crisis. Receiving Akinci's limp comment that the MFA had not been involved in the planning and that the exclusion had merely been an "oversight," the Lithuanian ambassador remarked that this was an imprudent gesture in the run-up to the EU's Dec. 17 summit and stormed out of the briefing. Kunakov opined it was all the fault of Turkish protocol.

18. (C) Full delegation political discussions: Akinci asserted the two sides "agreed on almost everything" but provided meager details, even when pressed during Q&As. Putin thanked the Turks for support for Russia's observer status in OIC and for humanitarian aid after the terrorist attack in Beslan. The two sides agreed to enhance existing anti-terrorism cooperation. When asked about reports the Turks arrested some Chechens before the visit, Akinci defensively replied the Turks arrested "thousands" of people prior to the Bush visit in June. A well-connected journalist told us Dec. 7 that at the delegation meeting Putin put on table folders with details of Chechens who he insisted had received terrorist training in Turkey, where they received the training, who trained and sheltered them. Saying they would evaluate the material, the Turks responded immediately by asking why Russia hasn't yet declared PKK/Kongra-Gel a terrorist organization. Kunakov told us it is the Russians' assessment that the Turks had not expected Putin to agree on

the spot; in any case, he said, it will be complicated for Russia to put PKK/Kongra-Gel on its terrorism list since an executive decree will not suffice; a court decision is required.

9. Regional issues:

--"Eurasia": in response to a question regarding Turkey's understanding of the "Eurasia" thesis of Alexander Dugin (who participated in the visit) and Turkish policy, Akinci airily called "Eurasia" a flexible term, "but whatever it is, Russia and Turkey are included."

--Cyprus: Akinci reported Putin as saying Russia is doing nothing to prevent Russian businessmen from doing business in northern Cyprus but the goal should be to equalize the economies of the two sides; Russia is working with both sides in this regard. The Turks asked Putin to support UNSC resolution supporting the Annan Plan; in what Akinci asserted was a more forthcoming approach than that of FonMin Lavrov (whom Akinci implied is jaded, having done Cyprus now for 15 years), Putin agreed to "study it" (septel for MFA Cyprus Department's view that Putin was more forward-leaning than that). Basaran and Kemal Kaya, head of the Turkish parliamentary administrative office, told us separately subsequently that Putin merely hid behind the EU, saying that Russia will shape its policy on northern Cyprus according to what the EU does. In describing Putin's approach in identical terms, Russian polcounselor Kunakov admitted that Russia still has strong equities in its current stance.

--Caucasus: Akinci said the Turks asked Russia to encourage Armenia to settle N-K; if Armenia recognizes the Turkish border and withdraws from occupied Azerbaijani territory, Turkey will respond with five positive steps for every Armenian one. The Russians charged Georgia with not being accommodating regarding settlement of Abkhazia or South Ossetia; in neither case has Georgia proposed a solution, Putin asserted. Only when pressed in the Q&A session did Akinci give any detail on the Turkish response, and then only offered thin gruel: Turkey respects Georgia's territorial integrity and calls for a peaceful settlement. Akinci claimed the Turks "took note of Russian views." He asserted that Turkey's position has not changed since 1991; it's only the positions of Georgia and Russia that have changed. The two sides agreed to continue bilateral consultations on the Caucasus.

--Meskhetian Turks: Akinci said the Turks asked the Russians to end discrimination against Meskhetian Turks in Krasnodar by placing them under federal law and removing them from the arbitrary administration of the Krasnodar governor. The Russians responded that Turkey should pressure the Georgians to take the Meskhetian Turks back as Georgia had agreed to do as a condition for its acceptance into the Council of Europe; the Turks agreed to pursue with the Georgians. Russian polcounselor Kunakov described the Turks' stance to us as reasonable and constructive on what is a "sensitive" subject for the Russians.

--Turkey's UNSC non-perm member bid: Putin said Russia will give "favorable consideration" but ducked a clear answer regarding Turkey's bid (for 2010-11); Akinci said the Turks figure the Russians will not show their hand until the last moment.

--Iran, Central Asia: Akinci claimed there was no discussion of Iran or Iranian nukes in the general delegation meeting, no detailed discussion of Iraq or Central Asia or EU: "Our relations with Russia have their own dynamics, our relations with the EU have their own dynamics."

--Iraq: both sides agreed security is not yet established, both agreed elections must not be postponed, Akinci said. Kunakov told us the Russians' assessment of the visit is that they and the Turks see eye to eye on regional issues such as Iraq.

10. (S) Comment: we will be pursuing answers to several questions that remain open: (1) how deeply Putin's offer of a strategic alternative to the U.S. and EU will influence Erdogan; (2) how well Energy Minister Guler will be able to resist commercial and political pressures to concede more of Turkey's up- and downstream energy sector activity to the Russians (in this regard Guler would like more consultations on strategy with U.S. officials to counter Russian moves); and (3) how far the Turks are willing to go on mil-industrial cooperation.

11. (S) But several points are clear. From the perspective of keen Russia watchers like pre-eminent national security analyst Faruk Demir, Putin, flush with petrodollars, is carrying out a four-pronged Great Game strategy to woo Turkey from the West, a strategy Demir and others expect the Russians will continue to push when Erdogan, Sezer, and Arinc each visit Russia in 2005.

12. (C) First, dangle the prospect of further lucrative contracts for Turkish businesses already in the Russian market and big trade/investment deals to strengthen the pro-Russian business lobby as a platform for political influence. In this regard, Putin is gambling that what is most important to Turks in the world is the prospect of money in the pocket. Second, squeeze the Turks on energy by underscoring Turkey's dependence on Russia and (by implication Russia's friend) Iran for natural gas and on trade by threatening a cut in commerce and tourism as a consequence of any Turkish move to join Schengen. Third, project the image of Russia as sharing Turkey's sense of being wrongly excluded (Rappallo Syndrome), as being more culturally attuned to Islam than the West, and as ready for more comprehensive and consistent political cooperation in the Black Sea, Caucasus, and Central Asia regions than the U.S. or EU are willing or able to offer. Fourth, expand Russia's network of agents of influence in Turkey.

13. (C) In this latter regard there are strong rumors circulating that Foreign Trade Minister Tuzmen is so interested in pumping up the view that Turkey's best trade partner is Russia because the Russians gave him several lucrative personal deals when he recently led a trade mission to Moscow. As we have heard from a source close to retired NSC SecGen and "Eurasia" promoter General Kilinc, Putin sent "Eurasia" architect Alexander Dugin to visit Kilinc preceding Putin's arrival to consolidate a Turkish "Eurasia" bloc. We have heard from good sources that the Russians are pressing to buy widely-watched Star TV, currently in government receivership. We see a concerted Russian effort to reach out with financial support to traditional civic organizations (e.g., core Turkmen organizations representing the more conservative heartland) and to religious brotherhoods and lodges.

14. (C) On the official Turkish side we see a conspicuous, across-the-board lack of analytic capability to assess Russia's motives or strategy. In addition, we observe -- in an ill-considered and emotional reaction against the perceived perfidy of the U.S. and EU -- the desire of a disparate and unreasonable, but vocal, range of people to turn their backs on the West and try something new, at a minimum as an alternative policy choice with which to stand up to the U.S. or EU. This group, which includes some politicians and academics (e.g., FonMin Gul ally and foreign policy advisor Davutoglu), a fair number of journalists (both left-wing and Islamist), some in the MFA, some active duty and many retired military officers, is currently fractious, but as long as the U.S. is in Iraq and negotiations with the EU are up and down, Russia will have fertile ground to exploit.

15. (C) Not all went Putin's way, however. First, Turkey -- both officialdom and public opinion -- will want to see whether Russia's policies toward Cyprus and the PKK evolve in Turkey's favor. Second, the Turks have their own centuries-old, multi-layered tradition of barbarian handling. Third, the Turks were irritated at Putin's heavy-handed push to sell the Russian attack helo, which the Russians have named the "Erdogan". Fourth, and most important, Putin is misleading himself if he thinks his projection of empathy gained a purchase beyond an old leftist-statist like Sezer. In this regard, Putin is his own worst enemy. Speaking to TOBB, the embodiment of conservative, heartland Turkish values, he tried to illustrate the growing bonds between the two peoples by noting that 500,000 Russian women have married Turks. Turkish girls are pretty as well, and now it's time for them to come to Russia to marry Russians, he said. As a broad section of our contacts -- "secular" and pious -- noted, what has lodged in the collective Turkish mind is the thought that "Russia has exported 500,000 women of ill repute, and now the infidel wants to take our daughters."

EDELMAN